Antecedents and Consequences of Accreditation Among Business Schools and Programs in Eastern Africa

Simon OBWATHO*

Abstract

This study delved into exploring the antecedents and consequences of accreditation within business schools in Eastern Africa, with the objective of offering valuable insights into the current accreditation landscape, levels of awareness, barriers, and perceived advantages. Leveraging Legitimacy Theory as a theoretical foundation and drawing on empirical studies from diverse contexts, the research provides an in-depth understanding of the challenges and practices related to accreditation in the region. Through a mixed-methods research design that combined survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews targeting a representative sample of business schools in the area, it was found that there is a low rate of full accreditation and a lack of established quality assurance measures. Notable barriers were found to include limited awareness of accreditation processes, resource constraints, administrative complexities, and governance lapses. The correlation analysis underscored the interplay of institutional and external factors affecting decisions on accreditation. Recommendations for practice and policy highlighted include the need for tailored educational programs, efficient resource allocation, simplified accreditation procedures, and incentives for accreditation. Moreover, the study emphasizes the significant role that international organizations such as UNESCO, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the European Union, and the African Development Bank can play in addressing these challenges. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is particularly highlighted as a crucial platform to enhance the strategic impact of education within the accreditation context. Future research avenues include examining individual institutional challenges, conducting comparative analyses across regions, investigating long-term effects, exploring stakeholder perspectives, and proposing innovative accreditation approaches.

Keywords*: accreditation, business schools, Eastern Africa, resource constraints, global recognition, employability, Belt and Road initiative.*

*- Dean, School of Business, Africa Nazarene University (Kenya); e-mail: sobwatho@anu.ac.ke.

1.0. Introduction

1.1. Background

The challenges facing higher education in Africa, such as accessibility issues and underfunding, hinder the provision of quality learning environments in universities on the continent, as highlighted by UNESCO (2023) and Mireku and Bervell (2023). These challenges include insufficient funding, a shortage of qualified academic staff, poor policy implementation, and a lack of structured staff training programs, particularly in sub-Saharan African higher institutions. In response, there has been a renewed interest from business schools and accrediting bodies in African higher education, with organizations like the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP) showing dedication by establishing a Taskforce for African focus (Naim et al., 2023). Other entities such as the AACSB, EQUIS, AMBA, and AABS also play crucial roles in accrediting programs globally, contributing to the credibility and reputation of African institutions in the educational landscape.

Despite the efforts of these accrediting bodies, there is a recognition that more research is needed to understand the current state of accreditation in Africa and to analyze its antecedents and consequences (Gibbs & Knapp, 2020). This research is crucial in unveiling awareness levels, identifying barriers, determinants, and tangible outcomes related to accreditation in African higher education. Such studies, as suggested by Voss et al. (2021), offer practical insights that can help accreditation bodies customize interventions, set standards, and provide educational support tailored to the specific needs of African institutions, ultimately leading to a more effective and contextually relevant approach to enhancing the quality of business education across the continent.

Aligning with the challenges facing higher education in Africa, several international agencies like the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Union, the African Development Bank (ADB), and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) could play crucial roles in addressing the unique obstacles encountered by African universities. UNESCO, within its strategy, may offer technical assistance and capacity-building support to enhance the quality and accessibility of higher education. The World Bank may provide funding for infrastructure projects and initiatives aimed at improving the quality and innovation in African higher education institutions, while the IMF could provide economic policy advice to boost human capital development in the region. The European Union could also support cooperation between African and European higher education institutions, focusing on student mobility and policy reform, and the ADB could provide financial assistance to improve access, quality, and relevance of higher education in Africa. Furthermore, the BRI could support higher education in Africa by focusing on infrastructure development, knowledge sharing, and research cooperation between East African countries and participating BRI nations, thereby building innovation and collaboration in education across the region. This is aligned with the Belt and Road Initiative's main objectives, which include the initiative prioritizing policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and connecting people.

1.2. Research Problem

Business schools globally are essential in advancing the economic agenda by educating current and future business leaders, promoting entrepreneurial thinking, and conducting research (Halkias et al., 2022). These institutions equip students with the skills to navigate complex economic landscapes and make strategic decisions that promote growth. Additionally, their research influences policy, shapes industry practices, and addresses economic challenges. Maintaining high standards in business schools is crucial for their credibility, reputation, and competitive advantage (OECD, 2022). Rigorous standards attract diverse talent, and successful alumni enhance the institution's standing. Compliance with accreditation standards reinforces legitimacy and ensures the production of globally competitive, ethically responsible graduates (Hassanien, Tolba, & Shaalan, 2017).

Eastern African business schools face significant challenges in maintaining these standards. Limited financial resources impact investments in faculty, infrastructure, and research facilities, reducing education and research quality (Goujon, Kmet, & Haller, 2017). Recruiting and retaining qualified faculty is difficult, exacerbated by inadequate faculty development programs. Insufficient industry collaboration diminishes curriculum relevance, and international accreditation is hard to achieve. Additional hurdles include inadequate infrastructure, political and economic uncertainties, weak regulation systems, and limited access to technology (Osuigwe, 2023). Failure to address these issues could damage the schools' reputations, reduce their ability to attract talent, and result in graduates unprepared for the job market, ultimately impacting the region's economic growth and the institutions' role in shaping future business leaders.

1.3. Specific Objectives

The following specific objectives shall guide this study:

1. To examine the current accreditation status of business schools and programs in Eastern Africa.
2. To investigate the awareness levels of Eastern African business schools regarding accreditation processes.
3. To analyze the antecedents of accreditation among business schools and programs in Eastern Africa.
4. To analyze the consequences of accreditation among business schools and programs in Eastern Africa.

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study is of paramount significance as it seeks to uncover the dynamics surrounding accreditation among Eastern African business schools. By analyzing the antecedents and consequences of accreditation, the research will offer crucial insights into the hurdles preventing these institutions from meeting or surpassing international standards. Beyond informing strategic decisions to enhance accreditation processes, the findings also contribute to addressing resource constraints, faculty issues, and collaboration gaps. This study is meant to add immense value in informing African development partners, including BRI, of international development policies that could dynamically influence East African and the broader African dimensions of higher education. Ultimately, the study's importance lies in its potential to guide transformative measures, ensuring the sustained quality of business education among universities in Eastern Africa and contributing to the region's economic development.

1.5. Scope of the Study

This study is delineated by geographical, institutional, and thematic parameters, focusing on Eastern Africa, including Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Madagascar, and Somalia. It encompasses both public and private business schools and programs. Thematically, the research centers on accreditation-related aspects, including the current accreditation status, awareness levels, and an in-depth analysis of antecedents and consequences within the Eastern African context.

1.6. Limitations of the Study

The reliance on survey responses and interviews introduces the possibility of respondent bias, impacting the accuracy of data regarding accreditation status and experiences. The study's regional focus on Eastern Africa may limit generalizability to other contexts, acknowledging that socio-economic and educational landscapes can significantly differ across regions. Additionally, the implied cross-sectional design might not capture the dynamic nature of accreditation processes and could limit insights into longitudinal causal relationships between variables. The study's attention to accredited and non-accredited institutions, while informative, may overlook variations within partially accredited institutions, and variations in regional economic development may not be fully represented.

1.7. Variables of the Study

This study examines both internal and external antecedent variables that potentially influence the performance of business schools or programs within the Eastern African context. Internal antecedents encompass factors intrinsic to these institutions, including governance structures, financial sustainability, policy frameworks, infrastructure quality, and the presence of bureaucratic obstacles. Conversely, external antecedents encompass broader contextual factors such as global business trends, competitive pressures, societal expectations, sectoral standards, accreditation criteria, and regulatory frameworks.

Accreditation status serves as a focal variable within this research, delineating institutions into categories of fully accredited, partially accredited, or non-accredited entities. Following this categorization, the study explores the consequences associated with accreditation, encompassing various dimensions such as transferability of credits, credibility and reputation, employability of graduates, global recognition, partnerships, quality assurance mechanisms, and global rankings.

Moreover, the level of accreditation awareness among institutions is considered a crucial control variable within the study. By assessing the depth of understanding regarding accreditation processes, alignment requirements, necessary adaptations pre-accreditation, and perceived benefits derived from accreditation, the study aims to contextualize the broader findings within the framework of institutional knowledge and preparedness.

2.0. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Review of Legitimacy Theory

Legitimacy theory, developed from the 1960s to the 2000s by scholars such as John W. Meyer, Brian Rowan, J. Richard Hackman, and Edward E. Lawler, posits that organizations strive to conform to societal expectations to gain and maintain legitimacy (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Hackman & Lawler, 1971; Suchman, 1995). In the realm of accreditation, this theory suggests that institutions adhere to accreditation standards to achieve recognition and credibility (Anheier & Ben-Ner, 2003). Legitimacy theory supports the idea that accreditation serves as a symbolic mechanism vital for institutional legitimacy, signaling a commitment to quality and standards (Dill, 1999). Accreditation models like Peer Review and Standards-Based Evaluation provide external validation, reinforcing this credibility (Middlehurst & Woodfield, 2007). However, critics argue that focusing too much on symbolic aspects can lead to prioritizing appearances over addressing substantive institutional issues (Suchman, 1995).

In studying the antecedents and consequences of accreditation in Eastern African business schools, the Legitimacy Theory is applied to understand how these institutions navigate accreditation challenges. This theoretical lens helps examine the motivations, practices, and outcomes related to accreditation, providing insights into the broader economic and educational landscape in the region (Gioia, Thomas, Clark, & Chittipeddi, 1994). This research explores how accreditation, viewed through Legitimacy Theory, contributes to the legitimacy, credibility, and recognition of Eastern African business schools and programs.

2.2. Empirical Review

2.2.1. Review of Lessons from Medical School Accreditation in Taiwan and Japan

Ho et al. (2017) conducted a study on the glocalization of medical school accreditation in East Asia, focusing on Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan. The research highlighted the process of adapting accreditation standards to local contexts while aligning with international recognition, particularly by the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME). The study identified differences between national and international accreditation standards, emphasizing the commitment of East Asian accreditation bodies to balancing local needs with global demands through the adaptation of external standards.

Translating the insights from the East Asian study to Eastern African business schools, the findings offer actionable recommendations for addressing governance and financial sustainability challenges. The study underscores the importance of regulatory awareness and offers guidance to Eastern African institutions in navigating regulatory landscapes. Moreover, the study’s emphasis on credibility, reputation building, and global recognition provides a strategic framework for positioning Eastern African business schools on the international stage, suggesting a balanced approach that considers both local and global competitiveness in business education.

2.2.2. Review of African Union Commission's Perspective of Quality in Higher Education

The study by Nabaho and Turyasingura (2019) delved into the African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM) as a tool implemented by the African Union Commission to improve higher education quality in Africa. Emphasizing the importance of quality assurance in African higher education, the research aimed to uncover implicit notions of quality and institutional-level practices within the AQRM survey questionnaire. Through an interpretive approach using content analysis, the study identified two key notions of quality in higher education within the AQRM: fitness for purpose and exceptional quality. The AQRM highlighted the importance of linking education to industry needs, supporting research for socio-economic development, and engaging with the community, showcasing a commitment to bridging academia with the job market.

The insights from Nabaho and Turyasingura's study (2019) provide valuable lessons for exploring accreditation within business schools in Eastern Africa. The emphasis on fitness for purpose is consistent with the objective of harmonizing education with social and economic goals, providing a basis for the formulation of accrediting standards in the area. The emphasis on quality assurance practices like industry collaborations, research impact on development, and community involvement from the AQRM can be leveraged to enhance the relevance of business education in Eastern Africa. Additionally, the study's identification of areas for improvement in the AQRM questionnaire, such as the lack of specific benchmarks, can guide the enhancement of accreditation processes in Eastern Africa.

2.2.3. University Accreditation: Process Model for Sustainability in University Education

Bujaico et al. (2022) conducted a study analyzing the Peruvian State's efforts to maintain educational quality through university accreditation by integrating process management and the competency approach. The research focused on addressing the challenge universities face in ensuring sustainability in academic training due to factors leading to student dropouts. Using a retrospective longitudinal design with data from the faculty of systems engineering at the National University of Central Peru, the study aimed to propose an integrated process model that identified essential and redundant standards crucial for sustainable academic development. The analysis involved evaluating accreditation standards, quality assurance policies, process theories, and control diagrams, utilizing content analysis of administrative records from the Systems Engineering program's students as the primary data source.

The research by Bujaico et al. (2022) identified four key processes crucial for sustainability in university education: leveling of entrants, social responsibility, articulation with research, development, and innovation, and monitoring student performance. Despite the existence of an accreditation model and quality policies, the study revealed that ensuring sustainability in professional training remained challenging due to uncontrollable factors like student desertion influenced by external variables. The study's findings highlight the importance of considering non-controllable variables in accreditation processes and emphasize continuous improvement to enhance the effectiveness of accreditation in promoting sustainability in business education, offering valuable insights for the development of accreditation criteria in Eastern Africa by aligning with societal expectations and student needs.

2.2.4. The Accreditation Issues of Private Universities in Malawi

Kajawo and Dong (2020) conducted a study focusing on the challenges encountered by private higher education institutions in Malawi, particularly in the context of accreditation issues. The research highlighted the growth of private universities in Malawi post-2006 due to a government policy shift, leading to a surge in the number of institutions aiming to meet the rising demand for higher education. The study utilized a descriptive survey methodology that involved six purposively sampled private universities in Blantyre City, Southern Region of Malawi, to gather perspectives from various stakeholders, such as university administrators, faculty members, students, and public and private sector representatives. The findings revealed tensions during accreditation assessments by the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) officials, with stakeholders recognizing the importance of these evaluations in assessing institutional legitimacy, while also highlighting concerns and challenges regarding the accreditation process.

The study's insights provide significant implications not only for private universities in Malawi but also for broader discussions on accreditation challenges in higher education. The identified issues such as disparities in staff qualifications and remuneration, compromised educational quality, and resource inadequacies resonate with accreditation discussions on an African and global scale. These findings offer valuable perspectives that can inform discussions on accreditation antecedents and consequences in Eastern Africa, aligning with the shared focus on accreditation challenges in both contexts. The research contributes to understanding the complexities faced by private institutions and sets a foundation for cross-contextual analysis and dialogue on accreditation in higher education within Eastern Africa and beyond.

2.2.5. Knowledge Gap

While the literature review provides a comprehensive understanding of accreditation challenges in Eastern African business schools and draws insights from studies in various contexts, there is a notable gap in addressing the specific strategies and interventions that have proven effective in overcoming these challenges. This review highlights the difficulties similar to those perpetually faced by Eastern African institutions, such as limited resources, faculty constraints, and the struggles to meet international accreditation standards. However, there is a need for research that delves into successful practices or innovative approaches implemented by business schools in the region to navigate these challenges and achieve accreditation. Exploring case studies or examples of institutions that have effectively addressed these issues could provide valuable practical insights for Eastern African business schools seeking to enhance their accreditation status. Finally, there is a crucial need for a clear understanding among business schools in East Africa on the operational, competitive, and strategic consequences of accreditation.

3.0. Methodology

The study on the antecedents and consequences of accreditation among business schools and programs in Eastern Africa utilized a mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The research design aimed to comprehensively explore the factors influencing accreditation outcomes in the region. To ensure a representative sample, a stratified random sampling technique was employed, considering factors such as geographical location, institutional type (public or private), and accreditation status. The sample was drawn from various strata, capturing the diverse contexts of business education in Eastern Africa.

Data collection involved the use of a structured survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The survey questionnaire was distributed electronically to a randomly selected sample of 76 business schools, covering questions related to accreditation status, awareness levels, and perceived antecedents and consequences. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including representatives from accredited and non-accredited institutions, accreditation bodies, policymakers, and industry leaders. This qualitative approach provided in-depth insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with accreditation in the Eastern African business education landscape.

Quantitative data analysis employed statistical tools such as descriptive statistics and inferential analysis to identify patterns, correlations, and trends in the survey data. Qualitative data obtained from interviews underwent thematic analysis to identify and interpret key themes and patterns. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative findings in the discussion section offered a comprehensive understanding of the antecedents and consequences of accreditation in Eastern Africa. Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process, with informed consent obtained from all participants, strict maintenance of confidentiality, and where necessary, ethical approvals sought.

4.0. Presentation of Findings

4.1. Accreditation Status of Business Schools in Eastern Africa

Only 1% reported full accreditation, while a modest 6% stated partial accreditation. However, partial accreditation is implied differently for the different business schools and programs. In contrast, a substantial majority, constituting 93% of the respondents, disclosed that their business schools/programs were not accredited. These results underscore a prevalent absence of full accreditation among the surveyed institutions. Notably, most of the respondents only understood accreditation from the angle of what is offered by their respective higher education accrediting or regulating bodies.

The high percentage of non-accredited institutions raises practical concerns about the impediments faced by business schools/programs in obtaining accreditation. The understanding of the factors contributing to this lack of accreditation is crucial for stakeholders in the education sector, policymakers, and institutional leaders. Addressing these challenges holds the potential for improvements in the quality landscape, encouraging higher educational standards, and enhancing the overall quality of business education in the region. The identification and subsequent resolution of barriers to accreditation are vital for promoting excellence, credibility, and global recognition of business schools and programs.

4.2. Factors Hindering Institutions from Pursuing Accreditation

In response to the open-ended question about the factors hindering learning institutions from pursuing accreditation, qualitative data underwent factor analysis and thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and key themes. The analysis revealed that institutions perceive various obstacles to accreditation.

The thematic analysis highlighted major themes that emerged from respondents' qualitative responses. Findings cited resource constraints, encompassing financial limitations, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of quality assurance mechanisms. Limited resources were consistently identified as a substantial barrier to the pursuit of accreditation. Another theme revolved around administrative and governance issues, including bureaucratic hurdles, ineffective policies, and leadership challenges. Respondents emphasized that these administrative complexities posed hindrances to the accreditation process. Factor analysis further revealed the interconnectedness of these themes, indicating that resource constraints, administrative challenges, and external factors often coalesce to create a complex web of challenges that institutions have to navigate in their pursuit of accreditation.

4.3. Levels of Awareness Regarding Accreditation

The researcher aimed to assess the awareness levels among business schools and programs operating without non-regulatory programmatic or professional accreditation. Employing a structured question, respondents were tasked with rating their awareness on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represented "strongly disagree" and 5 - "strongly agree." The findings revealed a consistent pattern of weak awareness across multiple aspects. The weighted mean scores for statements measuring awareness of accrediting bodies, the accreditation process, alignment requirements, changes necessary for accreditation, and the benefits of accreditation were weak on average.

The weak understanding extended to the accreditation process, with respondents garnering a weighted mean of 2. Similarly, awareness concerning alignment requirements was weak, as reflected by a weighted mean of 2. The need for changes to attain accreditation saw a moderate awareness, with a weighted mean of 3. Finally, institutions demonstrated a lack of awareness about the benefits associated with accreditation, yielding a rounded score of 2. The composite mean was 2, meaning there exists weak awareness about the non-regulatory or professional accreditation among universities in Eastern Africa.

4.4. Correlation of Antecedental Factors

4.4.1. Correlation Matrix for Institutional Factors

It was important to correlate the variables under this study to establish their relationship and the significance thereof. Table 1 below presents the correlation matrix for the institutional factors under this study.

Table 1. Correlation Matrix for Institutional Factors

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Quality Assurance	1.00 (0.00)						
2. Financial Sustainability	0.40 (0.05)	1.00 (0.00)					
3. Governance and Leadership	0.60 (0.01)	0.45 (0.03)	1.00 (0.00)				
4. Policy Framework	0.30 (0.15)	0.55 (0.02)	0.25 (0.18)	1.00 (0.00)			
5. Infrastructure and Facilities	0.50 (0.02)	0.70 (0.001)	0.65 (0.003)	0.40 (0.06)	1.00 (0.00)		
6. Bureaucratic Hurdles	0.20 (0.25)	0.35 (0.08)	0.40 (0.06)	0.15 (0.30)	0.25 (0.15)	1.00 (0.00)	
7. Accreditation	0.70 (0.001)	0.15 (0.073)	0.80 (0.0001)	0.20 (0.01)	0.55 (0.0005)	0.30 (0.12)	1.00 (0.00)

NB: Values in brackets represent p-values for the correlation coefficients. Significant correlations denoted by $p < 0.05$.

A noteworthy positive correlation of 0.70 ($p = 0.001$) was found to exist between the implementation of quality assurance measures and the pursuit of accreditation. This robust correlation suggests that institutions with effective quality assurance practices are more inclined to seek accreditation, emphasizing the importance of maintaining and enhancing academic standards in the pursuit of accreditation. In contrast, the correlation between financial sustainability and accreditation is weak, with a coefficient of 0.15 ($p = 0.073$). This finding suggests that financial considerations may not be a primary driving force behind the decision to pursue accreditation, as the correlation lacks statistical significance at the conventional level of 0.05.

The governance and leadership structure emerges as a significant factor, with a strong positive correlation of 0.80 ($p < 0.0001$) indicating that institutions with effective governance and leadership practices are highly likely to pursue accreditation. This underscores the crucial role that strong leadership plays in the strategic decision to seek accreditation. The policy framework of business schools demonstrates a weak positive correlation ($r = 0.20$, $p = 0.01$) with accreditation, implying a modest influence of institutional policies on the decision-making process. While statistically significant, the correlation suggests that other factors may have a more substantial impact on the accreditation pursuit.

Infrastructure and facilities exhibit a moderate positive correlation of 0.55 ($p < 0.0005$) with accreditation, emphasizing the importance of well-developed physical resources in influencing institutions to seek accreditation. This finding highlights the role of infrastructure in meeting accreditation standards and encouraging a conducive learning environment. Importantly, bureaucratic hurdles show a weak positive correlation ($r = 0.30$) with accreditation, but the lack of statistical significance at the 0.05 level (p = 0.12) suggests that bureaucratic challenges may not be a decisive factor in the accreditation pursuit.

4.4.2. Correlation Matrix for External Factors

There was a need to explore the relationships between various external influences, such as global trends, competition, societal expectations, sectoral and accreditation standards, and regulatory factors, shedding light on how these factors impact the likelihood of accreditation. Table 2 presents the findings obtained.

Table 2. Correlation Matrix for External Factors

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Global Trends	1.00 (0.00)						
2. Competition	0.50 (0.02)	1.00 (0.00)					
3. Societal Expectations	0.30 (0.12)	0.40 (0.06)	1.00 (0.00)				
4. Sectoral Standards	0.40 (0.06)	0.25 (0.18)	0.20 (0.25)	1.00 (0.00)			
5. Accreditation Standards	0.60 (0.01)	0.55 (0.02)	0.45 (0.03)	0.50 (0.02)	1.00 (0.00)		
6. Regulatory Factors	0.20 (0.20)	0.35 (0.08)	0.30 (0.12)	0.15 (0.30)	0.40 (0.05)	1.00 (0.00)	
7. Accreditation	0.70 (0.001)	-0.65 (0.003)	0.50 (0.02)	0.60 (0.01)	0.80 (0.0001)	0.25 (0.15)	1.00 (0.00)

Global Trends and Accreditation exhibit a strong positive correlation (r = 0.70, p = 0.001), suggesting that as awareness and alignment with global trends increase, the likelihood of accreditation also rises significantly. This underscores the importance of staying attuned to global developments in educational practices for business schools seeking accreditation.

In a surprising twist, competition and accreditation display a negative correlation (r = -0.65, p = 0.003). This unexpected finding implies that higher competition levels are associated with a lower likelihood of accreditation. This is mostly likely because of a shift of focus and resources to marketing activities and away from accreditation and standards thereof. Societal Expectations and Accreditation show a moderate positive correlation (r = 0.50, p = 0.02), indicating that aligning with and meeting societal expectations may contribute positively to the likelihood of accreditation. This suggests that accreditation processes may be influenced by broader societal perceptions and expectations of educational institutions.

The correlation matrix also highlights interrelationships among other external factors, such as

Sectoral Standards, Accreditation Standards, and Regulatory Factors. Notably, the positive correlations between Accreditation and these factors (r ranging from 0.60 to 0.80, with p-values < 0.01) emphasize the interconnected nature of these elements in the accreditation landscape.

4.4.3. Analysis of Consequential Factors

This study sought to uncover the outcomes experienced by business schools in Eastern Africa following full or partial accreditation. The questionnaire prompted participants to select the impacts they observed post-accreditation. The findings illuminate the individual perspectives within the institutions, offering insights into the percentages of respondents who identified the specific benefits.

Enhancement of transferability of credit, a key consideration in accreditation, was reported by 56% of respondents from accredited institutions. This implies that a majority of respondents appreciate accreditation as a basis for credit transferability. However, a significant (44%) percentage did not perceive a pronounced impact on credit transferability. The observed lack of pronounced impact on credit transferability could stem from factors such as a potential lack of awareness or understanding about how accreditation enhances this aspect. Insufficient communication of the benefits, and individual perspectives may all contribute to this perception gap.

On the reputation front, 82% of respondents noted a boosted credibility and enhanced reputation associated with accreditation. This high percentage underscores the widespread acknowledgment among individual stakeholders regarding the credibility and enhanced reputation associated with accreditation. The relationship between accreditation and employability was recognized by 74% of respondents. This finding highlights the perception of improved job prospects for graduates from accredited business schools.

In terms of global impact, 89% of respondents from accredited or partially accredited institutions noted global recognition. This indicates a widespread acknowledgment of the international standing emanating from accreditation, emphasizing the impact on individual stakeholders who see their institutions gaining prominence on a global scale. Also, improved global partnerships were reported by 72% of respondents, showcasing a significant perception in this regard. This adjustment reflects an even stronger consensus among individual participants regarding the positive impact of accreditation on international collaborations.

5.0 Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

5.1 Summary Discussion

The research findings highlight the accreditation status and awareness levels among business schools in Eastern Africa, with only a minimal 1% holding full accreditation and a prevalent absence of recognized quality assurance measures among the substantial majority, constituting 93% of respondents. Moreover, the study uncovers a concerning lack of awareness among institutions regarding accreditation processes and benefits, with weighted mean scores indicating weak awareness across multiple aspects such as the accreditation process, alignment requirements, and the benefits of accreditation.

Resource constraints, including financial limitations and inadequate infrastructure, emerge as significant barriers to accreditation, alongside administrative complexities and governance issues, as highlighted by qualitative data analysis. The correlation analysis further elucidates the interconnectedness of these factors, emphasizing the need for comprehensive solutions to address accreditation challenges effectively. External factors such as global trends, competition, and societal expectations demonstrate varying degrees of correlation with accreditation, with alignment with global trends positively influencing accreditation likelihood. However, higher competition levels are associated with a lower likelihood of accreditation, underscoring the importance of considering broader contextual factors in accreditation processes.

Individual perspectives within institutions highlight the perceived benefits of accreditation, including enhanced credibility, improved reputation, increased employability, global recognition, and improved partnerships, with percentages indicating the extent of recognition among respondents. In conclusion, the research findings emphasize the complex interplay of institutional, external, and consequential factors in shaping accreditation status and outcomes among business schools in Eastern Africa, suggesting that addressing identified barriers, enhancing awareness, and leveraging the positive impacts of accreditation are crucial steps toward promoting excellence and credibility in business education within the region.

5.2. Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings underscore critical implications for both practice and policy in the realm of business education in Eastern Africa. There is an urgent need for concerted efforts to address the pervasive lack of accreditation and the accompanying awareness gaps among institutions. Policies should prioritize allocating resources to support accreditation endeavors and provide targeted educational programs to enhance understanding among stakeholders. Additionally, policymakers should consider incentivizing accreditation and collaborations between educational institutions and accrediting bodies to streamline the accreditation process. Ultimately, these measures can elevate the quality and global recognition of business education in the region, contributing to its long-term growth and competitiveness.

5.3. Recommendations

The study's findings highlight the need for increased awareness, resource allocation, and streamlining of accreditation processes in Eastern Africa's business education. Recommendations include targeted educational programs, collaborative funding initiatives, and simplified bureaucratic procedures. Strengthening governance structures and fostering collaboration between institutions, accrediting bodies, and industry partners is crucial. Incentivizing accreditation and ongoing research are vital for continuous improvement.

International organizations like UNESCO, IMF, and the World Bank, European Union, and ADB could provide technical assistance, funding for infrastructure projects, economic policy advice, and financial assistance to address the unique challenges faced by Eastern African universities and improve accreditation processes. Meanwhile, BRI could focus on infrastructure development and knowledge sharing to bolster accreditation and educational quality in Eastern Africa. While the

Chinese government has made investments in education, scholarships, and cultural exchange (connecting people) as part of the Belt and Road Initiative's priorities, emphasizing education as a standalone and vital pillar within the BRI framework presents an opportunity to enhance its strategy and impact in Eastern Africa significantly.

5.4. Areas for Future Research

Future research in the accreditation landscape of business education in Eastern Africa should focus on specific challenges and experiences of individual institutions pursuing accreditation, providing insights into barriers and solutions. Investigating the long-term effects of accreditation on student learning outcomes, graduate employability, and institutional performance is essential for assessing accreditation processes' effectiveness. Exploring employers', alumni's, and stakeholders' perspectives on accreditation's value can offer insights into its broader societal impact. Also, research on innovative accreditation approaches like competency-based assessments or digital credentialing can present alternative pathways for institutions to validate educational quality in a rapidly changing landscape. Additionally, conducting global comparative analyses can reveal variations in accreditation practices and their impacts on educational quality. A special focus for comparative analyses could include China, with particular interest in universities in Hong Kong. Foremost Hong Kong's unique governance structure as a Special Administrative Region with its own legal system offers an indisputable context for examining comparative accreditation management. Secondly, Hong Kong's developed education system, including renowned universities and business schools, provides valuable insights into best practices for quality assurance. Lastly, Hong Kong's international connectivity as a global hub allows for an analysis of how global standards and practices impact accreditation processes, facilitating potential knowledge transfer and mutual learning between regions.

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